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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [ABLD](#) [KS](#) [KN](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR VERSHBOW DISCUSSES OPCON WITH GNP FLOOR  
LEADER KIM HYOUNG-O

Classified By: Amb. Alexander Vershbow. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Opposition GNP Floor Leader Kim Hyoun-g told the Ambassador several times in a meeting on September 6 that the Grand National Party (GNP) strongly urged the U.S. not to discuss a timetable for the handover of wartime operational control (OPCON) at the September 14 summit or the October DefMin meetings. He stressed that the current Roh government should not make any decisions regarding OPCON and the next government starting in 2008 should handle the OPCON transfer issue. The Ambassador explained U.S. policy regarding OPCON and stressed that any agreement on OPCON transfer would be one on which both countries agreed. He also emphasized that Koreans should look at the transfer of OPCON as a natural, positive step that will result in a stronger alliance, with a more balanced sharing of responsibility, without any reduction in deterrence or military capabilities. Rep. Kim asked the Ambassador to consider the views of the GNP and the Korean people when deciding on a date for OPCON transfer. The Ambassador assured him that he would work to understand all perspectives in Korea with the goal of reaching a mutually beneficial agreement. END SUMMARY

OPCON, OPCON AND MORE OPCON  
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¶2. (C) In a September 6 meeting requested by Rep. Kim Hyoun-g, GNP's second ranking official, Ambassador Vershbow noted that a successful transfer of wartime OPCON to the ROKG, done responsibly, could keep the alliance strong for the long term. He explained that a roadmap, to be approved by both the U.S. and ROK Defense Ministers in October, would lay out the next steps and he assured Kim that the roadmap would spell out a path that would keep deterrence and military capabilities undiminished on the Peninsula. The Ambassador assured Floor Leader Kim that the U.S. would continue to provide key capabilities such as air and intelligence support. He noted that whatever the final decision on the timing of the transfer, the U.S. remained committed to ensuring the safety of the Peninsula and to keeping its defense capabilities after the transfer just as strong as they are now.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador said that the U.S. was listening to Korean views that urged a slower timetable for OPCON transfer. He would work to explain the U.S. view on OPCON to Koreans so the transfer could be viewed as a positive,

natural development in our alliance, making it a more balanced partnership in line with the ROK's growing strength and global role. The issue was not a question of sovereignty, as some ROK leaders claimed, since the ROK already has sovereignty within the CFC structure; General Bell receives political direction from both Presidents Roh and Bush.

¶4. (C) Floor Leader Kim asked if Secretary Rumsfeld's statement that OPCON transfer could take place in 2009 was U.S. policy or if it was his personal view. The Ambassador said that the SecDef's statement reflected his view and that of U.S. military commanders that the transfer could be done in three years with minimal risk. But we obviously needed to reach mutual agreement on how fast the transfer should take place.

#### DISCUSSION OF TIMING

¶5. (C) Kim vehemently stated that a "lame duck" like President Roh should not decide important security issues like the transfer of wartime OPCON. The Ambassador noted that governments deal with governments and that the transfer of OPCON was being discussed bearing in mind both countries' interests. Kim pleaded with the Ambassador to urge Washington not to discuss the details of a timetable for OPCON transfer at the September 14 summit or the October DefMin meetings. Since the vast majority of Koreans did not trust the Roh government, any discussion of timing for OPCON transfer could cause internal turmoil, according to Kim. He said it would divide the Korean people if there were a timetable set for transfer. Therefore, he emphasized, timing should not be discussed in October.

¶6. (C) The Ambassador said he understood Kim's concerns, but reiterated that, if handled responsibly, an agreement on a roadmap for the transfer of OPCON did not have to be viewed so negatively. He added the U.S. would do its part to show that its commitment to the ROK's defense would be as resolute under the new command arrangements as it is today.

#### BURDEN SHARING

¶7. (C) The Ambassador asked Kim for the support of the National Assembly for South Koreans to take a larger share of the burden for financing U.S. troops stationed in Korea. He said that Korea should shoulder more of the burden as they move toward a more equal partnership with the United States.

#### ROH'S MOTIVATION

¶8. (C) Both Kim and Rep. Hwang Jin-ha said Roh wanted to assume wartime OPCON so he could sign a peace treaty directly with North Korea that excludes the U.S.; they cited statements by National Security Advisor Song Min-soon that elimination of CFC was a DPRK requirement for a peace treaty.

The two lawmakers added that the ultimate goal of the Roh government was to get U.S. troops off the Peninsula.

¶9. (C) The Ambassador said he was not comfortable with these misleading arguments. But even under the most accelerated timetable, the transfer of OPCON would occur under the next ROK administration. He concluded by saying that agreement on the roadmap was only the start of a process that would be evaluated at each stage, and that agreement to transfer wartime OPCON was in the best interests of both countries.

VERSHBOW